

THE  
*Use and Abuse*  
OF  
DIVERSIONS.  
A  
SERMON  
ON  
LUKE XIX. 13.

WITH AN  
APPENDIX, shewing that the  
*Stage* in particular is an *Un-  
christian Diversion.*

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By the Reverend GEORGE ANDERSON, V. D. M

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*The second Edition corrected.*

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READER

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## READER,

**F**OR publishing the following Sermon, I can plead the Misrepresentations of some, and the Approbation of others. Nor do I want the Importunity of Friends, whom I never once solicited to importune me, the common Topick for Apology on such Occasions. Perhaps I have likewise had Advices for Silence and Suppression. But for this Time I follow my own Opinion. I preach'd on the Subject, because I thought it seasonable to offer some Correction in Righteousness, to the overgrown Levity of the Age; and chiefly for the same Reason I now make, what I said then, still more publick. I do not think my Voice could have distinctly reached my numerous Congregation; (a) and they that will, may supply by the Eye, what they missed by the Ear. I have taken the Freedom to add a few Things, which the Time allotted to that Part of Divine Service, and my own Slowness of Speech, did not allow me to insist upon. But I do not enlarge any Thing, which then I did not mention. If you take my Preaching for the first Publication, (and it is a verbal one) this is but a second Edition with Additions.

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Id

(a) Trone-Church of Edinburgh.

*In the Appendix I have given my Opinion of the Stage. And partly to shew that it is not a mere humourfome Picque in me, and partly to fatisfie thofe that fay, I had advanced more than I am able to prove, I have given my Reasons why I think it Unchristian. I hope no judicious Christian, or well-bred Gentleman, will call this (a) flying in the Face of the Government, an intolerable Rudeness, and a hair-brain'd Stupidity, which deserves no Answer but what is ludicrous. Tho' I should, with Leave, think, that flying in the Face of the Government, deserves a serious and not a ludicrous Treatment. I do believe that the Government would discourage the Stage, were they of my Opinion in the Matter. They look upon Play-houses with another Eye than I do; and, as I think, they sincerely differ from me, I hope they will believe, that I as sincerely differ from them; and that they will look upon it as lawful, fair and honest, in a Minister of the Gospel, to warn Christians, whenever he himself is convinced of the Unlawfulness of any Practice of theirs, and especially of a particular Diversion, which, without Danger to the State, may well be dispensed with. I have heard much of the Power of Prejudice, and of the various Openings and Passages into different Minds. And therefore, if what I have said should have no Influence upon the Judgment of any one, the worst I shall think of my Readers, is, that they are honestly, tho' culpably in an Error.* FAREWELL.

(a) *Hints in Defence of dramatical Entertainments.*



A

# SERMON, &c.

LUKE XIX. 13.

— — — — — *Occupy till I come.*



*ALL the Ways of a Man are clean in his own Eyes, saith Solomon, Prov. xvi. 2. It is natural to a Man who hath any just Notion of GOD, and of the religious Duties which he owes him, and is at the same Time impressed with the Apprehensions of future Rewards and Punishments, in order to save himself the troublesome Checks of Conscience, and to get rid of his uneasy Fears, to form to himself a Set of Principles to justify his Conduct. And if those Principles cannot furnish out a compleat Vindication, then, taking the Thing a little lower, he submits to make*



make Use of them, as Excuses and Apologies, to extenuate and lessen his Faults, after he hath accustom'd himself to commit them.

THERE is a Kind of *intellectual* or *rational* Necessity either of bringing up our Practice to our Principles, or of bringing down our Principles to our Practice. And because there's nothing more intolerable than the Rebukes of one's own Mind, he uses all Shifts imaginable to make up the Quarrel with himself, and is surprizingly dextrous and successful in finding out Expedients for the Purpose. Besides his general Principles which he imagines he believes, and which perhaps he really believes, he hath for his more immediate Use, other little private Maxims of his own. And these his *secondary* Notions and Opinions overballance and defeat his more general and *primary* Persuasions. Many there are who believe the great Doctrines and consequential Duties of the GOSPEL; but then they believe with such *Salvo's* and Exceptions, with such Reserves and Limitations, with such Additions and Interpolations, that those Divine Truths have no Influence at all upon their Lives. Tho' one would not be apt to think it, there's scarce a wicked Christian in the World who hath not a particular and private Religion of his own. It hath been calculated by the Curious, that there were no fewer than Six hundred different Religions, all legally established in old or heathen Rome: But that  
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Number is nothing in Comparison of that endless Variety of religious Sentiments, which hath prevailed, and still prevails among the Professors of our *holy Faith*. In this Case, we may almost say, *As many Men, so many Minds*.

I CANNOT be brought to have so low an Opinion of Mankind, as to persuade myself that one who hath taken upon him the Yoke of CHRIST, and looks upon the GOSPEL as the Rule of his Life, and the Law by which he is to be judged at the *great Day*, would allow himself to live in the habitual Breach of that Law, and in a constant Neglect of the Duties of his holy Profession, and at the same Time enjoy the Peace and Approbation of his own Mind; this, I say, I cannot persuade myself of, if he had not some private Principles of his own to support him, and to enable him to look his Conscience in the Face.

ONE imagines that GOD being infinitely good, will never call him to a severe Account: And, all his Threatnings against Sin notwithstanding, he still hopes his merciful Sovereign will dispense with what he hath spoken merely *in terrorem*, and at last shew himself better than his Word. Another fancies that his Sins are the insuperable Frailties of Nature, which he is not accountable for. A third pleads the invincible Force of Temptation. A fourth hopes that GOD will grant him Repentance at last, and freely pardon all the Sins, which, until then, he is capable



capable to commit. And a fifth excuses himself by the Example of others, some of which, he says, are not better, and others much worse Men than himself. It were endless to be particular. Thus conceited Sinners *hold the Truth in Unrighteousness (a)*, and wofully carry on the Delusion to their own Destruction; so true are those Words of Solomon, *There is a Way which seemeth Right to a Man, but the End thereof are the Ways of Death (b)*.

AMONG many such ruinous Schemes of practical Religion, there is one which hath a very great Currency with those that seem to bid fairest for the Kingdom of Heaven: That is, *They are innocent People, and do no Manner of Ill in their Generation*. It is not every one that can say so much; but they that say so, and think themselves safe, and out of eternal Danger, are exceedingly mistaken, if that is all they can say for themselves. For Christianity doth not consist in *not doing Ill* only, but likewise in *doing Good*. We are the Servants of God, and Servants must neither be idle nor ill employed. And that our *doing no Evil* can be no Excuse for our *not doing Good*, our LORD JESUS CHRIST hath taught us expressly. And because the Delusion is both common and fatal, the better to bear home the divine Lesson, and to imprint it upon our Hearts and Minds, he hath taught it us in the Parable of ten Pounds committed to

(a) Rom. i. 18. (b) Prov. xvi. 25.



to ten Servants, to be by them bettered and improved; of which Parable the Words that I have read, are a Part. *Occupy till I come.*

BEGINNING at the Verse immediately preceeding my Text, we read these Words of our LORD and SAVIOUR, *A certain Nobleman went into a far Country, to receive for himself a Kingdom, and to return. And he called his Ten Servants, and delivered them Ten Pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.* During this Nobleman's Absence, his own Citizens took up a Resolution to reject him as their Ruler, and sent Messengers or Ambassadors after him, to intimate, in Form, this their Fellony and Rebellion. The Nobleman nevertheless returns, and first calls his Servants to account for the Pounds he had intrusted them with, and then avenges himself of those his Enemies who would not have him to rule over them. The Money might have been improved, or kept uselefs, or squandered away: But the Account which those Servants make, consists only of two Branches, *Improvement* and *Non-improvement*. For among all the Ten, there is not one represented to have lost, or squandered away the Pound intrusted to his Care and Management. And of Ten there is but one, in the Parable, that was found negligent and idle. Happy were the Christian World, in Comparison of what it is at present, if no more, in Proportion, miscarried in the great Trust committed to them. Those that made

a good Use of their Pound, are honoured and rewarded in Proportion to their Diligence and Industry. And the unprofitable Servant, who did not squander away, but only kept his Pound useless, is condemned out of his own Mouth for a *wicked* Servant.

By this Nobleman, all understand our LORD JESUS CHRIST. By his going to a far Country to receive a Kingdom, is understood his Ascension into Heaven to take complete Possession of his Kingdom as Mediator, to whom all Power is committed both in Heaven and in Earth. By his Return, some understand his Return at *the last Day*, and others understand the Destruction of the *Jewish* Nation, that had actually rejected him: But we may understand both, because the one is a Representation of the other, as may be seen by perusing the xxiv. chap. of *Matthew*. By the Pound (*a*), we understand the Kingdom of the MESSIAS, the GOSPEL, or generally all those Gifts and Graces, Privileges, Opportunities and Occasions which GOD is pleased to put into our Hands, of knowing and doing his holy Will for our Salvation; and likewise all external and temporal Blessings, such as Health, Strength, Learning, Wealth, Time and every Relation we stand in; as Magistrate, Subject; Parent, Child; Master and Servant. The Servants, then to whom these Pounds were committed, represent to us, not only Rulers

(*a*) Thirty Ounces of Silver.

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ers and Governors, Ministers and Teachers of the Church of God, but likewise every particular Member of it.

WE have no Occasion to stretch the Parable beyond the Scope, in order to observe, that *Non-improvement* of Privileges is Ground of Condemnation; and that the most innocent, but idle Life, that one can possibly lead, will not justify him in the Sight of God. Our LORD hath commanded us to *occupy till he come*, that is, to trade with, and improve, all his Gifts and Graces, and to use every Opportunity to the best Advantage. But if we hide our Pound in a Napkin, and *stand all the Day idle*, and that not in the Market-place, but in GOD's Vineyard, (which makes a considerable Alteration in our Case to the worse) instead of being harmless and innocent, as we pretend, we are wicked Servants in the Judgment and Account of our great Master: For saith our LORD, *Out of thy own Mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked Servant (a).*

ALL which notwithstanding, many Christians, and in a special Manner, very many of those whom Birth, Estate, a superficial or pedantick Education have distinguished from the rest of Mankind, have formed to themselves a negative Kind of Religion, and established a Morality which consists either in doing nothing at all, or nothing to the Purpose. And though in the GOSPEL of our LORD JESUS CHRIST,

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there

(a) Ver. 22.



there is nothing more expressly condemned, yet, in Contempt of their holy Profession, they have reasoned out to themselves a very idle Rule of Life.

I BELIEVE it is open to the Observation of all, that a Spirit of Idleness and Levity prevails exceedingly in this City; and in Proportion to the Number and Riches of the Inhabitants, more than in any other City in *Europe*. And as far as I can understand, the best that can be said in Favour of what inhances the Time and Thoughts of the gayer Sort, is, that they are harmless and innocent Amusements, and that to employ their Time in such a Manner doth no Hurt to any one. I shall therefore make it my Endeavour, with the Assistance of GOD, to convince such, that their idle Conduct is highly criminal and sinful; and that upon these two Accounts.

I. BECAUSE an idle Life, made up of Pleasures and Diversions, however so harmless and innocent in themselves, is Unchristian, and defective of good Works.

II. BECAUSE, in itself, it is sinful and unlawful.

IT is certain that Men sin both by *Omission* and *Commission*; by neglecting to perform the Duties of their Profession and Station, and by doing Things contrary to, and inconsistent with them. In so far then as they are idle, they do

do no Good, and while they are idle, it would be very strange if they did no Evil.

I. I SAY an idle Life made up of Pleasures and Diversions, however so harmless and innocent in themselves, is Unchristian, and defective of good Works.

1. SUCH a Life is unbecoming the Followers and Disciples of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. As Christians we are the Followers of a *Captain made perfect through Sufferings*, and the Members under a Head crowned with Thorns. We are the Disciples of a Master *who went about doing Good*, and submitted to Reproach and Persecution for doing it. We read that *Christ pleased not himself (a)*; and his not having pleased himself while here on Earth, is used as an Argument why we ought not to *please ourselves*. So far was our LORD from pleasing himself, that he was a *Man of Sorrows*, and thoroughly *acquainted with Grief*. The Worshipers of the golden Calf might eat and drink, and then rise up to play, (which now seems to be the whole Employment of several) but they that have taken the LORD JESUS for their Master, have other Business upon their Hands, and another Example to follow. Our blessed Saviour, during his Abode among Men, did a great many Things, and denied himself several Enjoyments as ~~Men~~ *Man*, not so much as absolutely necessary Parts of his mediatorial Office,

(a) Rom. 15. 3.

Office, as for our Example and Imitation: And he hath laid it down as a preliminary Condition of our being Christians, that we follow him, and copy in our Lives the Pattern which he hath shewed us; *Then said Jesus unto his Disciples, If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself (a).* It is a Mistake to think, that our holy Christian Faith requires nothing of us but what we are bound to by the Law of Nature. One that doth not know or profess the GOSPEL, may imagine, that he doth his Duty as a reasonable and religious Creature, when he indulges himself in all Pleasures, in a Way consistent with the Safety of his Health and Strength, and the Vigour of his intellectual Faculties. But to imagine that Christianity requires no more at our Hands than *Epicurean* Philosophy doth, is to put a great Dishonour upon our holy Religion. *Mortification* is a Duty taught (b) expressly in the GOSPEL, and strongly recommended by the Example of our dear Redeemer. While we run our Christian Race, we are to look unto *Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith*, and while we have him in our Eye, our Lives shall be formed upon the Model of his Example, and not upon the Lusts and Pleasures of this World: We are therefore exhorted by the Apostle *not to be conformed to this World, but to be transformed by the renewing of the Mind (c).*

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(a) Mat. 16. 24. (b) Col. 3. 5. (c) Rom. 12. 2.



The same Mind ought to be in us which also was in CHRIST JESUS: For he that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (a).

2. A LIFE of Pleasures and Diversions however so innocent in themselves, is inconsistent with the Spirit and Strain of the GOSPEL. Our Holy Religion teaches us our sinful and ruinous State by Nature, and calls upon us to look upon ourselves as Criminals in the Sight of GOD. It should therefore be our great Business as Christians, to obviate by a timely and continued Repentance those Judgments which our Sins do deserve. Our stated Behaviour must then be such as becometh Penitents. And a Penitent, you know, must not live to please himself, to follow his own Inclinations, to gratify his Senses, to indulge himself in Ease and Idleness. By no Means. His Business is serious and grave, his Vocation laborious, and such as requires Diligence, Activity, Patience and Self-denial. It is therefore impossible for a Man, as a Sinner, and as a Christian, to discharge his Duty, if the whole, or the main, of his Life is spent in Pleasure, Ease, and Idleness; if his Thoughts from Morning to Night, and his Dreams from Night to Morning, run upon nothing but the vain and idle Amusements of this World, and that tho' those Amusements in themselves, were as innocent as lifting up or laying down  
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(a) 1 John 2. 6.

the Hand. The Salvation of our Souls is the great Business of our *Being* : And whatever we do that hath no Tendency to promote that, is but idle and impertinent. And what Relation and Subserviency have all the Amusements of this World, especially such Amusements as ingross our Thoughts, to this noble and necessary End? He that appears the most active, while he doth nothing to the Purpose, is just as idle and impertinent, as he that doth nothing at all. Shou'd the Inhabitants of a City, besieged by an Enemy, spend their Time in cleaning their Streets and in adorning their Houses, not to say, in Plays and Diversions; for all their Pains, they would act a most foolish Part, while they neglected the Watch and Defence of their Walls. Our Souls suffer a daily Siege from the Devil, the World and the Flesh; and for us, in such Circumstances, to bestow our Thoughts and Time upon Trifles entirely foreign to the Defence and Safety of our precious and immortal Spirits, argues, that, instead of being only merry, as is pretended, we are really mad and distracted.

3. CHRISTIANS of all Sorts are agreed that in order to serve GOD and to save our Souls, there is a certain Sort of Grace (for my Subject will not allow me to enter into Particulars) which GOD must bestow, and we must accept.

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According to which Doctrine, *Augustin* (a) one of the most Orthodox of all the Christian Fathers, calls our Salvation the Work of GOD, by Reason of his gracious Call, and our Work, because we hear and obey it. And in this he follows the Stile of the *Holy Scriptures*. Now upon the most superficial Examination of the pretended innocent Life, I am now speaking against, it is manifest, that it puts us out of Condition to accept of that Grace of GOD, or to answer the End and Design of it: And consequently it induces GOD, on his Part, either to hold his Peace altogether, or to speak but in a weak and feeble Voice, and thus, we being indisposed to profit by his Grace, and the Source of all Gospel-holiness and good Actions thereby being stopt, there is no more Good in us. In order to reap Advantage of God's gracious Call, we must hear it, and in order to hear, we must give Attention, not in a careless and transitory, but in a serious and sedate Manner, which allows it suitable Time and Opportunity to enlighten the Understanding, to instruct and to perswade; and to touch the Heart and Conscience. But what Appearance is there, that they can hear and obey the Call of GOD, to these blessed and saving Purposes, whose Thoughts are full of Vanity and Trifles, and so full of

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(a) Hoc opus suum voluit esse & nostrum: Suum vocando, & nostrum sequendo.



those idle and impertinent Things, that there is no Room left for God and the Things of Salvation? Can any one expect that God will *work in him to will and to do according to his good Pleasure*, who is so far from working out his own Salvation, that he doth not so much as think upon it? The GOSPEL, or the Grace of God, (for so is the GOSPEL called) (a) can have no Access into the Minds of those, of which worldly Business or Diversions, by Turns, take the intire Possession. As the Thorns in the Parable (b) choaked the good Seed that was thrown among them, so do your Past-times, Parties of Pleasure; Comedies, Balls, Gaming, stifle the Instructions of the Gospel, when the municipal Law of the Land, which forbids those Diversions on the LORD'S Day, forces you to find Time to hear them. And as a Life spent in Pleasures and Diversions, is unbecoming the Disciples and Followers of CHRIST, and is contrary to the Spirit and Strain of the GOSPEL, and hinders us to lay hold of the Grace of God; So,

4. SUCH a Life is a Contradiction to the Precepts of our *holy Religion*. The Psalmist not only commands us to *depart from Evil*, but to *do Good* (c). The Prophet *Isaiab* (d) says, *Cease to do evil and learn to do well*. And that none may

(a) Tit. ii. 11. (b) Mat. xiii. 7. (c) Psal. xxxiv. 14.  
(d) Chap. 1.

may think, that this is only an Old Testament Commandment, the same is repeated and renewed under the GOSPEL (a). He that would love Life and see good Days, let him eschew evil and do good. Our LORD and SAVIOUR hath said, (b) *Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much Fruit, so shall ye be my Disciples.* And the Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians in these Words, (c) *My beloved Brethren, be ye steadfast and immovable always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your Labour is not in vain in the Lord.* To follow out this Point, were to repeat not a few Passages only, but a great Part of the holy Scriptures. Ye need but open your Bibles at a Venture to be fully satisfied, that a Life spent in Pleasures and Diversions is irreligious and unchristian. There's scarce a Metaphor that represents Pains and Diligence, Work and Labour, but what is used in Scripture, in speaking of Religion and the Ways of Salvation. It is watching, warring, wrestling, fighting; it is working, striving, running, pressing forward. That for which we are to take so much Pains, is represented as a Crown of Victory and Triumph; and these Crowns are only bestowed upon them that fight and overcome. The Kingdom of Glory is represented as a Reward; and the Reward is to him that

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work.

(a) 1 Pet. iii. 10, 12. (b) John iv. 8. (c) 1 Cor. xi. ult.

worketh, and not to the Idle and Indolent. He that would save his Soul, hath much to do; and the Danger of doing too little, makes the most careful and assiduous Christians *work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. They never please themselves with the Thoughts only of doing no Evil, but believe they always fall short of their Duty when they do no Good.

To convince us that Barrenness and Unfruitfulness in good Works is a Sin, and a sinful State, our LORD cursed the Fig-tree (a) which grew by the Way-side, and with a Miracle made it wither into Dryness. And in a Parable another fruitless Fig-tree (b) is ordered to be cut down as cumbersome to the Ground, and was spared only at the earnest Intercession of the Dresser. But nothing better exposes the Delusion of thinking we do enough to be saved, when we do nothing to the contrary, than the Parable of which my Text is a Part. No Man was more innocent in his own Eyes, and none represented more harmless than the Servant that hid his Pound in a Napkin; and yet for all his Apology, he is condemned for a wicked Servant. And, as if one Parable had not been enough, we are taught the same Thing by the Parable of the Talents, which concludes with Words to the same Purpose with that before us. *Thou wicked and slothful Servant-- Thou oughtest to have put my Money to the Exchangers,*  
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(a) Matth. 11. (b) Luke 13.



and then at my coming I should have received my own with Usury. Take therefore the Talent from him—and cast ye the unprofitable Servant into utter Darkneſs, there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of Teeth (a). And, to ſay no more on this Head, the Account which we have of the awful Proceſs of the great and laſt Day, is ſufficient to perſwade us, that we are criminal in not doing Good, as we are in doing Evil : For the Wicked are convicted and condemned, not formally for doing ill Offices to CHRIST and his Members, but for not doing Good to them : For, ſaith the great Judge of the World, *I was an hungred, and ye gave me no Meat ; I was thirſty, and ye gave me no Drink ; I was a Stranger, and ye took me not in ; naked, and ye cloathed me not ; ſick and in Priſon, and ye viſited me not* (b).

NOT only our holy Faith, but even our Reason may ſatisfy us, that an idle Life muſt be diſpleaſing to GOD our great Maſter. Would any Man excuſe his Servant for neglecting the Buſineſs intruſted to his Care, only becauſe he could plead, that he had done no Ill ? And with what Face can ye expect a great Reward in Heaven, only becauſe ye can ſay, though ye did nothing to ſerve your GOD, and ſave your Souls, yet ye did Harm to No body, but only ſpent your Time and Day of Grace in innocent Paſſimes, and harmleſs Diverſions and Recreations.

(a) Matth. 25. 26—30. (b) Matth. 25. 42.

nions. But, my Friends, these Recreations and Diversions are far from being so innocent as ye imagine. For, as I promised to shew you in the

II. PART of my Discourse, a Life made up of Pleasures and Diversions is, in itself, sinful and unlawful.

DON'T imagine I speak Contradictions, when I say that a Life spent in innocent Diversions is in itself sinful. For when any Diversions, however so innocent in themselves, make up our Life, or the Main of it, that Life becomes sinful. By doing no Good you do Evil. Idleness in itself is a State of Sin, and the Source of many Sins and Crimes.

I. I SAY Idleness in itself is a sinful State. If we look into the Lives of several, who either are, or would appear to be above the Wants and Necessities of this World, (and for whom I principally intend this Discourse) we may say that the Day is already come, wherein *Men are Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God* (a). And, for this Reason, there is scarce any of the Diversions of the Times but what are sinful. I know I shall be reckoned a severe and unfashionable Casuist; I am sorry for it, for their Sake who think so, and wish them a juster Opinion of the Thing, whatever Thoughts they may entertain of me. I am ready to bear the Reproach of those that will not be convinced, provided I could, by the  
Blessing

(a) 2 Tim. 3. 4.

Blessing of GOD, be helpful to others who are lost in a continued Pursuit of Pleasures, and who, from one Diversion to another, run a hot Chace after their own eternal Ruin.

SHOULD I, for Fear of your abusing my Concessions, push the Point of Diversions beyond the Bounds of Christian Morality, then should I *speake wickedly for God* (a), and hurt my own Soul by a fraudulent but friendly Endeavour to help yours. I shall therefore be loath to set your Amusements in a more disadvantageous Light than they deserve. Nor shall I industriously give any one a Handle to refuse all, because there is too much demanded. I freely grant, that all Kind of Diversions are not discharged and forbidden all Kind of People, nor will I say that all Sorts of Pastimes are in themselves sinful and unlawful. I further own, that at present (Thanks to GOD for it) our Country is not a Land of Mourning. There is no Occasion to banish all Joy and Gladness out of the Land, nor for the Sons and Daughters of our Zion, to wear Sackcloth and Ashes, and for every Countenance to put on Sorrow. All which notwithstanding, the Diversions of this Time and Place, are almost all of them Criminal.

I BELIEVE you'll admit as an undoubted and Christian Truth, that all Pleasures and Diversions become Criminal and Sinful, when they

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(a) Job xiii. 7.



are irregular, and pass the Bounds which our *Holy Religion* hath set to them. And I have but too good Reason to persuade myself (and would to GOD I could persuade you likewise) that there are few, yea very few of our ordinary Diversions, but what exceed the Limits of Christianity. All Pleasures and Diversions are to be regulated and managed according to their End and Use. Now all the Use of Diversions is to ease the Body and Mind when wearied with Thought and Labour. Diversions, then, are only so far lawful as they unyoke the Mind from Study and Meditation, and the Body from Toil, in order to recruit and refit both for other and fresh Undertakings. This is their End, and this only is their Use. Whatever more enters into the Matter is beyond all Christian Measure, and consequently sinful and unlawful. Judge then, if I have spoken without my Warrant, when I said that the Diversions of this Time and Place, are almost all of them sinful. For were our Recreations and Diversions managed according to the Law of GOD, it would be People of Thought and Business, and not such as neither work nor think, that would attend them most; because it is these, and not those that want them. But they that are most taken with these empty Amusements, for ordinary, do nothing before them, and as little after them, except to fit and prepare themselves for the next silly Entertainment. All their

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View and all their Design in running from one Diversion to another, instead of rendering themselves more capable to serve their GOD and their Generation, is only that they may indulge their idle and childish Inclinations, and play the Fool continually; or perhaps, it is that they may banish and shut out all such serious, manly and Christian Thoughts, which otherwise might force themselves upon their trifling Minds. Diversions, then, only for the Sake of Diversions, or for worse, I am sure, no thinking Man will judge Christian and lawful. And whether most of the many Diversions, which now prevail in this City, are either intended or managed, for any better Purpose than to consume and spend the Time, which hangs heavily upon Hand, or to flatter and indulge a Spirit of Levity, I leave to yourselves to judge: And if this is the End and Use, the Measure and Moderation of your Plays and Parties of Pleasure, I am sure it is an inverting the Order of divine Providence, and making what otherwise is lawful to become sinful, and consequently your Sins to become your Pleasure and Diversion. May the LORD have Mercy upon the dangerous or desperate Case of such poor Souls. Diversions are only good when used merely for the Relaxation of the Mind, and the Refreshment of the Body, when the one is wearied with Work and Labour, and the other with Thought and Meditation. But Plays

of Profession, Diversions of Days and Nights, of every Day and every Night, that take up and consume all the Time, except what is bestowed upon eating and sleeping, and upon some Visits of Vanity, where Diversion too is generally the Subject of Conversation, must be Criminal in the Sight of GOD, who hath made us, not for Sports and Plays, but for his Service here, and the Enjoyment of himself hereafter. For then those Amusements, which ought to be the very smallest Incidents or Accessories of Life, become the main Ingredients, the Spirit, the Support and Foundation of it. This is what I condemn, and this I hope you'll condemn likewise.

THIS is so far from being a Christian Life and Conversation, that it is unworthy of a Man. A Subject so empty and trifling was never designed to inhaunce and ingross all the Thoughts of a reasonable Creature. It is really wonderful that People of tolerable Understanding can composedly sit down to confine their Thoughts and Discourse, for many Hours together, to a Subject below Children. It was justly said of one that excelled all *Greece* in instrumental Musick, (and Musick of all Diversions is the most natural and commendable ) that he was no great Man for excelling in so mean a Matter. And surely to excel in Game, Plays and Sports (upon which some People value themselves ) is what a Person of Sense should be ashamed of.

BUT



BUT besides the prevailing Excess of Diversions, which is always sinful, there are some of them now in Vogue, which never can be lawful when used with the greatest Moderation in the World, being forbidden by the GOSPEL.

I KNOW the Admirers of unlawful Diversions are not disposed to take my Word that they are unlawful, and which is more and worse, I am afraid they are not sincerely disposed to take the Word of GOD for it. Men never want Exceptions from all divine Precepts and Directions when they have a darling Inclination to favour. And because I have not Time to reason the Matter as fully as is requisite for your Conviction, I shall not so much as name them. At this Time, I wish I could put some Stop to the Excess and Abuse of Diversions, which is sinful beyond Debate. And when they are used beyond Moderation, they are not only sinful in the Use, but

2. THEY are likewise the Source of many Sins and Crimes. They occasion an unlawful Waste of Time. They occasion an unlawful Waste of Means and Substance. They weaken the Mind for Piety and Devotion, and lead into many Temptations.

I SAY they occasion an unlawful Waste of Time. Had we nothing to do with our Time, and were we not accountable to GOD for it, then might we throw it away at our Pleasure. But since upon our *Improvement* or *Non-improvement*

*ment* of it, depends an Eternity of Happiness or Misery, there is nothing of which we ought to be better Husbands. Whenever our Time draws near an End, and when we consider our selves as running into the Gates of another World, what would we not give for a few of those Days and Years which we have spent in Vanity? Time is a Treasure with which we may purchase a Kingdom which fadeth not away; but if we mispend this Price put into our Hand, this Kingdom is lost to us, never, never to be regained. Therefore to bestow the whole or too much of that Time upon our Amusements and Diversions, which we ought to lay out in doing Good to ourselves and others, and in securing the best, and preventing the worst that can possibly happen us, is at once the greatest Sin and the greatest Folly that we can be guilty of. When we lose our Time, we lose all that depends upon it: And more depends upon it than the Heart of Man can conceive.

EXCESS of Diversions occasions an unlawful Waste of our Means and Substance, especially the Diversions now most in Fashion. I do believe there is not one that follows the Pleasures of this Time and Place, but will plead that he bestows no more upon them than he can afford. Take their Word, and they neither wrong themselves, their Families, nor defraud their Neighbours of their just Demands. I wish it may be so. I shall allow it; for it is not  
my

my Business to examine their Accounts. But if it should be otherwise, then a Flood of Sins follow. Domestick Quarrels, Neglect of Children, unlawful Delays of Payment of Debts, many mean and sinful Shifts used to gain new Credit, and, perhaps at last, the Ruin of a Family. This is but a natural Consequence of an idle Life spent in Pleasures. For *Solomon* hath said, (a) *He that loveth Pleasures, shall be a poor Man.* But supposing the best, that these Diversions cost but a Part of what you save, yet is that Part ill bestowed when laid out upon an excessive Use of them. When they surpass the Limits which our *holy Religion* hath set to them, every Thing is misemployed that goes along with them. And that *Overplus* is the Patrimony of the Poor, which ye ought not to defraud them of. It is the LORD's Bank set apart for Works of Charity, and it is a kind of Sacrilege to divert it another Way. I know that Want of Compassion to the Poor, is not the prevailing Sin of this City. Your Hearts and Hands are always open to their Cries, and you do all that is incumbent upon you, that there may be no complaining in our Streets. And what a Pity then is it that a tender-hearted Person, should thro' Inadvertancy, for a childish Diversion, deprive himself of that Relief and Pleasure which accrues to him, in relieving the Needy and supplying their Wants?

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(a) Prov. 21, 17.



DIVERSIONS used in Excess never fail to weaken and inervate the Mind for Piety and Devotion. The more Pleasure we take in vain and worldly Amusements, the less Pleasure we take in religious Exercises. The Joys and Glories above, have little Influence upon them that are immersed in Pleasures below. Your Taste is vitiated with carnal Pleasures, and ye neither desire nor relish spiritual Joys. Your Hopes of Heaven grow weak, and your Endeavours to attain it become languid. Your perpetual Pleasures give your Mind a trifling Set, and render it incapable of serious and solid Reflections. Diversions eat out the Life and Soul of Religion. And they that *live in Pleasure are spiritually dead while they live* (a). Therefore saith the Apostle John, *Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World, (that is inordinately) if any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him* (b). Waste of Time, Waste of Substance, and unfitting the Mind for Devotion, are the inseparable Consequences of an Abuse of Diversions, and always make up a Part of the Crime. And then,

THIS Excess leads into a Number of Temptations. While ye run from one Diversion to another, ye pretend to see the World, and to attend those Parties of Pleasure but in an honourable Way. In your Meetings and Assemblies there's nothing done or said against the Rules of De-

(a) 1 Tim. 5. 6. (b) 1 John 2. 15.

Decency and good Breeding. I do believe it. But for all the outward Decency and good Manners of your Diversions, every Heart is not Proof against sinful Thoughts and Desires, and many an undecent Idea, on those jovial and unguarded Occasions, are ready to enter into the Mind. In a Place where it is every one's Business to please, and to be pleased, it is a Wonder if some are not pleased in a Way displeasing to God. To an Eye that doth not see within the Recesses of the Soul, there's nothing appears, but what is gay and merry. But I am much afraid that in the Sight of God and his holy Angels, those Parties of Pleasure are, in a great Measure, a spiritual Massacre of Souls. One cannot read an Account of the Blood of so many miserable Gladiators spilt for the Pleasure and Diversions of the old Romans, without Horror. But as the Soul is infinitely more valuable than the Body, it should give us the greatest Concern and Uneasiness, that profess'd Christians should, in their frantick Fits, kill one another with eternal Death. *When Job's Sons feasted in their Houses, every one his Day, and sent and called for their Sisters to eat and drink with them; Then Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the Morning, and offered Burnt-offerings.— For Job said, It may be my Sons have sinned (a). The Hazard of their sinning was great, and Job offered an Atonement. The Hazard ye run of* com-

(a) Job 1.

committing Sin in your Diversions, is more than ordinary; and ye have Reason to be afraid of your offending GOD, more Ways, than by turning your Pleasures, by an excessive Use of them, into Sin.

I OWN a Person, in doing his Duty, may be exposed to Temptations, and may be carried away with them; but then these are Temptations he doth not sinfully or needlessly run himself into, and, in such a Case, he hath Reason to pray and hope for the restraining and protecting Grace of GOD to hinder him from succumbing. But when one boldly exceeds all religious Limits, merely for the Sake of a silly Amusement, as he cannot in such a Case, pray for the Protection of his GOD, to preserve him from falling under those Temptations he needlessly exposes himself unto, so he cannot expect it. And whether he yields or withstands, he sins in not being more watchful and careful of his own Soul. I shall now conclude, with a few Words by Way of Application.

I. IF there are any hearing me, who make Diversions the Business of their Life, or exceed in them the Bounds which Religion and Reason have set, let me beseech you to make better Use of what I have said, than to think the Preacher weak or vain for attempting to correct a Fault (if it is one) so well established by the Practice of the politer Part of Mankind. They that know not how to live themselves in the



he World, should not take upon them to direct their Superiors in Manners and Breeding. But ye know that every one ought to do his Duty, and refer the Event to the Providence of GOD. Ministers, like faithful Watchmen, are obliged to blow the Trumpet and give the Alarm, that the Blood of those, for whose Souls they watch, may not be required at their Hands. I have done my best to expose that delusory Pretence that most People make for an idle Life, that they are innocent and do no Hurt in their Generation. And if I have done it to your Conviction, I beseech and obtest you, in the Name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, do not sin against your Light. And if henceforth ye resolve, thro' the Grace of GOD, to imploy your Time and Thoughts in a more honourable, manly and lawful Way, your rejoicing will be the Testimony of a good Conscience, in which alone you'll find more Pleasure than in all the Diversions of the World.

• It is possible, notwithstanding all I have said, you may find out some Shifts and Evasions, which did not occur to me, and with these ye may fortify yourselves in your present Practice. And in such a Case, it may be said that I do more Harm than Good with such a Discourse. “ For if there is not Weight and Force enough in what I have advanced to beget Conviction, there may be too much that tends to distract and perplex the Minds

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“ of those that are not used to Argument, and  
 “ terrify their Souls with the shocking Appear-  
 “ ance of Guilt” (a). It being much better to  
 let you go on in sinning ignorantly, than to raise  
 Scruples in your Minds, which you make a  
 hard Shift to satisfy. Did Ignorance always  
 imply Innocence, perhaps it were Prudence to  
 let you alone. But that is impossible. For if  
 there is any Duty incumbent upon us, it is our  
 Duty to know it. All that is required of us  
 as Men and Christians, we are bound to under-  
 stand. Our very Ignorance, therefore, is cri-  
 minal, and so is our consequent Practice.

BUT if your Plays and Diversions are such  
 as you may freely and safely forbear altogether,  
 or use with great Moderation, there is no Hard-  
 ship put upon you, in perswading you to the  
 safer Side. And the very least Suspicion of the  
 Unlawfulness of any one of them, as to your  
 forbearing, is enough, and ought to determine  
 you. There are many Cases wherein a Man  
 may be out of his Duty either in doing, or for-  
 bearing, and may be in Danger of offending  
 this or the other Way. But when all the Dan-  
 ger is on one Side, and none at all on the other,  
 the least Scruple of Mind of that Side in which  
 the Danger lies, should determine them to take  
 the other. Ye will not needlessly trust or expose  
 your Estate or Health when you think that both  
 or either may be lost. Be wise likewise unto  
 Salvation, and do not trust your Souls, only  
 for

(a) Hints in Defence of dramatical Entertainment.

for a Frolick, upon any Uncertainties or *Maybe's*. When ye have Abundance of Diversions unquestionably lawful and safe, it is a Sin to make Choice of those of a suspicious Lawfulness and of certain Danger.

1. LET those of my Hearers who are not given up to Diversions, and have neither Time nor Inclinations for them, remember that they may, notwithstanding, be as idle and ill Servants, as he that hid his Pound in a Napkin. Tho' ye rise up early and sit up late, and earn your daily Bread with hard and continued Labour, yet if ye do not make your Labour subservient to the great End of your Being, ye are but idly employed. The great and only Piece of Work, which God hath committed to your Care, is the Salvation of your Souls. There is but this *one Thing needful*, and all Things therefore that do not tend to promote and secure that, are needless. And to be needlessly or idly employed, is the same Thing. Therefore set the Glory of God before your Eyes; and then how painful and laborious soever your Lives may be, yet in the main, ye live a *Life hid with Christ*. Ye are in your Duty. *And it is Joy to the Just to do Judgment*, or, as the Word may be rendered, *that which is right* (a). You'll have your Pleasures in more Purity and Abundance than the sensual or carnal do enjoy. Your Peace and Pleasure is what the World neither knows, nor can take away.

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3. LET

(a) Prov. xxi. 15.



3. LET none that spend their Time idly, and hide their Pound in a Napkin, complain that their Time is short. For were it much shorter than it is, 'tis but too long for them; and they have more than they make a good Use of. We have Time enough given us to work out our Salvation, and we want no more to throw away upon idle and wicked Purposes. *Let us then walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but as wise, redeeming the Time (a),* and making the best Use of all our Hours; and let us not imagine, that if we do no Evil, we are thereby excused from doing Good in our Day. Our Days and Years are a great Part of that Pound, which our LORD and SAVIOUR hath commanded us to occupy till he come.

4. SINCE our LORD hath commanded us to occupy till he come, and since therefore it is certain that he will come and ask an Account of all the Pounds and Talents intrusted to our Care, it should be our great Business so to manage and improve every Blessing, Privilege and Opportunity, as to have the Approbation of GOD our great Master. It will not be long before the LORD shall say unto every one of us, *Give an Account of thy Stewardship: For thou mayst be no longer Steward.* And when once this great Demand is made upon us, we shall have no Time to mend the Matter, and to correct our Mistakes. All the Pains then which Sinners have taken to flat-

(a) Eph. v. 15, 16. (b) Luke xvi. 2.

flatter themselves with the Thoughts that their eternal Affairs are in good Order, will avail them nothing in that Day of Account. Tho' all our Schemes of Excuses, and all the wrong Notions we embrace in Favour of our irregular Inclinations, may now amuse and please us, yet then shall we be ashamed to plead them. Those little *secondary* Sentiments in Religion, upon which our Practice is formed, appear to be adjusted and contrived for this World, and not for the next, for Time and not for Eternity. We now impose upon our selves with great Success, and sometimes we impose upon others, and imagine that if they are not able to demonstrate to us our Mistakes, we are perfectly safe. But such make too much haste. The Process is not yet over. They must give an Account to GOD as well as to themselves. They are now their own Judges, and they are favourable and partial ; but GOD at the Day of Judgment will see thro' all Disguises, and discover every wrong Step which they have taken to procure the Approbation of their own Mind. There is nothing would have a stronger and more natural Tendency to correct those Mistakes which Men industriously run into, than to consider that it is not their own present Fancies, but the Judgment of GOD that determines their Case and Condition, and then to suppose themselves standing before his awful Tribunal (and there all of us must stand) with the very same Defences and

and Excuses which now they plead to themselves and others ; and let them resolve to trust to none *here*, which they suspect *there* as insufficient. Tho' ye may deceive yourselves, ye cannot deceive God. *Be not deceived*, saith the Apostle (a), *God is not mocked : For whatsoever a Man soweth that shall he also reap :* If ye think ye cannot use too much Care and Precaution that ye may not be cast for a temporal Estate, no Diligence, no Care, no Pains, no Exactness, can be too much to gain your great and last Process, and to procure to yourselves the blessed Sentence (b), *Well done good and faithful Servant, thou hast been faithful over a few Things, I will make thee Ruler over many Things : Enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* And may GOD in his Mercy so guide us with his Council while here, that we may at last be brought into his Glory.

(a) Gal. vi. 7. (b) Mat. xxv. 21.







# APPENDIX.

## The STAGE an *Unchristian* *Diversion.*



HAVE said that ‘(a) besides the pre-  
 ‘ vailing Excess of Diversions,  
 ‘ which is always sinful, there are  
 ‘ some of them now in Vogue,  
 ‘ which never can be lawful, when  
 ‘ used with the greatest Moderation in the  
 ‘ World, being forbidden by the GOSPEL.’  
 Among these I did mean the Stage: But  
 because I had not Time to reason the Matter  
 as fully as was requisite for Conviction in such  
 a tender and favourite Point, I did forbear to  
 name it. It is an hard Task to encounter Mens  
 Heads and Hearts at once. I shall, however,  
 give my Reasons why I think the *Stage* unchri-  
 stian, and leave the Success to G O D, who by  
 his *Holy Spirit* can bear home the Persuasion.

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(a) Sermon Page 27.

I have likewise said, that “(a) it is a Mistake  
 ‘ to think that our *holy Christian Faith* requires  
 ‘ nothing of us, but what we are bound to by  
 ‘ the Law of Nature.”—For several Things  
 which that Law hath left merely Matters of  
 Discretion, are by the GOSPEL made Matters  
 of Command and Duty. *Mortification* or *Self-*  
*denial*, which runs through the whole of a Chri-  
 stian Life, is no Duty of natural Religion, but  
 only Matter of *Prudence* and *Precaution*. It is  
 therefore certain, that though the *Stage* were  
 the most innocent and harmless Diversion in  
 the World, it may, for the Abuse of it, be-  
 come the Subject of a *Divine Prohibition*.

It is therefore not in Point, to argue that  
 Stage-plays are not, nor cannot be condemned  
 by the GOSPEL, because when well reformed,  
 there is nothing in them contradictory to na-  
 tural Morality or good Reason.

It is undeniable Matter of History, that  
 those Plays have been condemned by several  
 Nations. And even the *Athenians* themselves (b),  
 who were the first and greatest Encouragers of  
 them, had a very mean Opinion of *Comedies*,  
 and enacted a Law that no *Areopagite* should  
 presume to write any: Though, for *Tragedies*  
 the *Lacedemonian* was in the right, who said,  
 That in them they played the Fool in good  
 Earnest.

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(a) Sermon, Page 14. (b) *Plutarch de gloria Atheni-*  
*ensium.*

It is also very true, that for the Space of Two thousand three hundred Years, I may say, from first to last, there always were, and are some Things to be amended and corrected in Stage-plays. We are inform'd by *Plutarch* (a) that all Comedies before *Menander* were so undecent and obscene, that they were not fit for Slaves that had honest Men for their Masters. Our modern Patrons of the Stage cry out mightily against the Plays of Antiquity as wicked and immoral, and the Author of *The ancient and modern Stage surveyed*, in particular, hath spent a great Part of his Book to expose the Faults of the ancient Stage, in order to excuse or extenuate those of the *English Stage* in his own Time. And to this Day dramatick Authors and their Criticks find Fault with Play-house Performances. And I do believe that impartial Judges perusing Plays with a Christian Eye, might find some Things blameable in the very best of them.

Now can any Man imagine, that it would be an unreasonable Hardship, or that it would savour of too much Severity, if *GOD*, foreseeing the incorrigible Wickedness of the Stage, or, at least, the hitherto uncorrected Abuse of the Theatre, should have forbidden it altogether in the *GOSPEL*? For the Abuse of the brazen Serpent, preserved long as a Monument of a miraculous Cure, it was at last destroyed by good King *Hezekiah* (b). In such a Prohibition,

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as

(a) *Symposiac. Lib. 7. Quest. 8.* (b) *2 Kings 18. 4.*



as would intirely lay aside all Stage-plays, with all possible Corrections and Reformations, I can see nothing inconsistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of GOD, nor with the Nature and Spirit of the GOSPEL. *Such a Prohibition then is very possible.*

AND if we may give Credit to an eminent Defender of the Stage, it was highly expedient, yea absolutely necessary, to have condemned the Plays practised in the primitive Times of Christianity. He owns, That (a) ' the GOSPEL ' doth not humour the Inclinations, nor indulge the Appetites of the People. To the ' Purity of its Doctrine a Conformity of Life ' and Manners was required. It curbs the ' Passions, and moderates the Desire. Instead ' of Pomp and Ceremony, Simplicity and Sobriety were to be the Entertainments of ' Christians.— The Fathers therefore, who ' knew how hard it was to keep the Appetites in an intire Subjection, took Care to ' fortify, as strongly as possible, those Parts in ' which they expected the Rebellion should ' first break out. The Plays of all the Heathen Solemnities were those that gave the ' strongest Temptations to the new Converts.— To obviate these Dangers, they ' summoned all their Prudence and all their Art. They omitted no Topick which Rhetorick or Satyr could supply, to frighten or ' per-

(a) The ancient and modern Stage surveyed, p. 16, 17.

perswade Men from those Diversions. Nor was all their Zeal and Caution any more than was necessary.

Now the Stage was as wicked and dangerous in the Days of the Apostles, as it was two, or three, or five Hundred Years thereafter, when the Fathers spake against it with so much Warmth and Zeal. Nor was their Zeal and Caution any more than was necessary. And if the Apostles have no where declared against the Wickedness of the Stage, and the Danger arising from it, one would think they wanted Part of that necessary Zeal which the Fathers were possess of. This would bear hard upon the Apostolical Integrity, and upon the GOSPEL itself as a Rule of Life, at least as long as the Wickedness of the dangerous Stage subsists.

WE have been told, and told again, by the Patrons of the Stage, That (a) ' if dramattick Entertainments were unlawful, it might raise a little Wonder why the Apostles, who went forth by a special Command of the Almighty to convert all Nations, preaching Repentance and the Kingdom of Heaven, that so exactly performed that great Commission, as to arraign Vice and Impiety from the highest to the lowest in all its several Branches, — That those Missionaries of Salvation should travel through so many Nations, and

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' meet

(a) Hints in Defence of dramattical Entertainments.

' meet, at every Turn, Theatres and Stage  
 ' players staring them in the Face, did not once  
 ' reprimand them. It is rational to think that  
 ' those divine Monitors who set Bars to the  
 ' Eye, Ear and Tongue, would hardly have  
 ' left the broad Gates to the Play-house open,  
 ' without one Warning to the unwary Chri-  
 ' stian, in so direct a Road to Perdition.  
 One would think those Gentlemen were in Jest,  
 if they themselves, and every Body that knows  
 any Thing of the Matter, did not know that  
 such actually was the Play-house in the Days  
 of the Apostles.

Now taking all this for granted, and I do  
 admit it as Truth, and adding thereto the *ne-*  
*cessary Zeal* of the primitive Fathers against  
 the Theatre; it amounts rather to an Impeach-  
 ment of the Apostles for their criminal Silence,  
 than to a Defence of the Stage. The Apostles  
 had perpetual Occasions of speaking against the  
 Stage, the Fathers did it commendably, and were  
 obliged of Necessity so to do, and had they not  
 done it, they must have wanted Christian Zeal.  
 And who then would imagine, that the Apostles  
 never said one single Word against those pro-  
 fane, lewd, wicked dramatical Entertainments?  
 They that have a greater Regard to the Stage,  
 than to the Sincerity, Faithfulness and Dili-  
 gence of the Apostles, may sink the *New Te-*  
*stament*, for the Preservation of Comedies and  
 Tragedies: But as I am of another Opinion, I  
 rather



rather believe that the Stage stands condemned upon *Gospel-record*. For we are further told, that (a) if it is sinful to go to a Play (and Nobody doubts but it was a Sin to go to the sinful Plays of the Apostolical Times) he deserves not the Name of a Christian that endeavours not to dissuade the World from it as sincerely as he can. Thus the Apostles either deserve not the Name of Christians, or they did dissuade the World from the Stage as sincerely as they could.

THIS, at least, should oblige us to search the *Scriptures* with all imaginable Candour, to see if there is any Thing contained in them, that can amount to a Prohibition of Stage-plays: And until we have searched with the greatest Diligence, we ought not to assume to ourselves a positive Assurance, that there is no Text in Scripture that condemns them. Methinks, for the Honour of the Apostles, and for the Credit of our *Holy Religion*, every Christian should wish rather to find out some express or consequential Condemnation of the Stage, than to discover that the Apostles did not faithfully execute their great Commission to *turn Men from Darkness unto Light*. My Principles as a Christian and as a Protestant, shall always hinder me to affirm that there is not one Text in Scripture which condemns the Heathen Stage, even tho' I could not find it out. And for all the Diversions in the

(a) Hints in Defence of dramatical Entertainments.

the World, I should not industriously distort those Passages of *Holy Scriptures* that point against Plays, in order to put a softer Sense upon them. I am sure it cannot proceed from a due Respect to the Christian Religion, to *chicane* with the Apostles, in a Point, upon which their Reputation for faithful Ministers of the Gospel, doth depend. One would think that a Christian would not take Pains to explain away any Passage that seems to make against the Theatre, and that he were more to be suspected of forcing the Words of the Apostles out of their Way to meet with those Stage-players that every where stared them in the Face. But I am going to shew you an eminent Instance of the contrary Disposition.

THE Apostle Paul, *Eph. v.* hath these Words, Verse 1. *Be ye Followers of God, as dear Children:*

3. *But Fornication, and all Uncleanness or Covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh Saints.*

4. *Neither Filthiness, nor foolish Talking, nor Jestings, which are not convenient: But rather giving of Thanks.*

5. *For this ye know that no Whoremonger, nor unclean Person, nor covetous Man, who is an Idolater, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ, and of God.*

6. *Let no Man deceive you with vain Words: For because of these Things cometh the Wrath of God upon the Children of Disobedience.*

7. *Be-*

7. *Be not ye therefore Partakers with them.*

THIS Passage, were there no more to the Purpose in all the *New Testament*, is enough to satisfy me that the holy Apostles did their Duty, and declared against the Stage-plays of their Time. And more than that; I verily believe that all Stage-plays, both ancient and modern are hereby prohibited by the Apostle. And what confirms me the more in this Opinion, is, the Pains taken by an ingenious Defender of Plays, to turn the Apostle's Meaning another Way (a). The Attempt is a Piece of Curiosity in its kind, and I shall therefore give it compleat.

HE fairly admits that '*Filthiness, Obscenity of Speech and idle Jestings* shall presently sweep all our Comedies, and then *foolish talking*, with a little Improvement, shall do just as much with our Tragedies. This, saith he, is to put the Apostle's Meaning to a higher Pitch than ever he intended.'——And which Way can any Man know that the Apostle's Intention was not so high as to have reached the Comedies and Tragedies of his own Time? The Words do not want to be stretched to reach the Length of the heathen Stage, and the Apostle ought to have intended some Things against it. One single Word of Caution to an unwary

(a) Filmer's Defence of Plays, p. 20.



wary Christian to keep him from running into the Way of Perdition, any one might expect from his apostolical Zeal. I persuade myself they would freely allow this Text to demolish the Theatres of the Heathens, were it not for Fear the present Stage might be involved in the Ruins. To save our own Comedies and Tragedies, the ingenious Author thinks he hath found out a Way to bring down the Apostles Meaning more than one half. He says, ' Unless we can be persuaded that St. Paul forbid all obscene, filthy, foolish talking and jesting under the same Penalty that he doth Fornication, on, actual Uncleanneſs or Covetouſneſs, I cannot see how the Words can do half the intended Execution. And this he thinks cannot be made out, since the 5th Verſe being a Recapitulation of the Crimes that exclude from the Kingdom of God, hath not one Word of obscene, filthy, foolish or idle talking or jesting. And to give the clear, true and full Meaning of St. Paul in the Place, he takes the Freedom to change the Order of his Words, and makes him thus advise and exhort the *Ephesians*.'

*Brethren, be ye Followers of GOD as dear Children: And as for Fornication, Uncleanneſs or Covetouſneſs, let them not once be named among you, not named with Allowance, not named with any Extenuation, not named but with ſome Detestation, as becometh Saints. For ye all know that no Whoremonger*

*mongers or unclean Person, nor covetous Man, who is an Idolater, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of God, or of Christ. Neither do ye, my Brethren, give yourselves over to encourage others in obscene, filthy, wanton Discourses, foolish talking or unseasonable Jesting, which are not convenient: But rather spend your precious Time in Prayer to GOD for those good Things ye daily stand in Need of, and in praising his holy Name for all those Blessings he hath already bestowed upon you.*

FROM this Paraphrase of his own making, he observes the vast Difference St. Paul himself makes between actual Uncleanliness and Obscenity of Speech, that being by him forbidden under the highest Penalty imaginable, this as inconvenient, and then only Criminal or Sinful, when either us'd in Excess, by Way of Encouragement to others, or by ourselves set up in Competition with our Duty to GOD.

HE owns that the Words of the Apostle sweep both Comedies and Tragedies, but not under the highest Penalty. That is, the Stage is not *damnable* but *venially* sinful; which Distinction takes no Place among Protestants. To excommunicate obscene Talking and Jesting from the highest Penalty, he acts the Part of a very bold Commentator, and changes the Order of the Apostle's Words. He makes Obscenity of Speech Criminal or Sinful, only when used in Excess, and not then either, unless it is used in Excess by Way of Encouragement to others; or when

we set it up in Competition with our Duty to God. Who could have imagined that the great and glorious Apostle of the Gentiles did intend to talk at such a Rate. For to set this Play-house Paraphrase in another Light, I conceive it runs to this Effect.

‘ I AS an Apostle, and now under the Inspiration of the *Holy Spirit*, do forbid all obscene, filthy, wanton Discourses, foolish Talking or Jestings; but don’t imagine that I forbid them as Sins which will exclude you from the Kingdom of CHRIST and of GOD. For there is a very great Distinction to be made between actual Uncleanneſs and Obscenity of Speech. Tho’ Fornication, used in Moderation, as well as in Excess, is always Criminal; Obscenity of Speech is only sinful when ye exceed in it, and that too, only when ye exceed in it by Way of Encouragement to others. And tho’ GOD hath forbidden you the Use of obscene Speech, yet if ye have a Mind to use it, ye may freely and safely do it, provided you do not disobey GOD, in Competition with your Duty to him. And in this Sense only ye are to understand my Words, for fear that I should be suspected of a Design of shutting up the broad Gates of the Play-house, and of warning the unwary Christian of so direct a Road to Perdition, tho’ in all other Cases we Apostles set Bars to the Eye, Ear and Tongue, and to every smallest Avenue that



‘ that might admit the Tempter. ’—— Is not this to distort the *Holy Scriptures* with a Witness, only because they point against Plays, and would sweep both Comedies and Tragedies from off the Stage.

BUT let us try whether, without changing the Order of the Apostle’s Words, they can bear a more worthy Meaning. And in order thereto, observe, 1. That in the Christian Churches among the Gentiles, there were several *Jews* of the Dispersion, and some such in the Church of *Ephesus*, as is to be seen *Acts* xix. 17. And the Apostle, in his Epistles, speaks sometimes to the Jewish, and sometimes to the Gentile Converts, and sometimes to both. 2. Observe, That when GOD forbids Idolatry, he says, *In all Things that I have said unto you, be circumspect and make no mention of the Names of other Gods, neither let it be heard out of your Mouth* (a). And the *Jews*, the better to testify their Aversion to some certain Things forbidden by their Law, did forbear to name them. For Instance, for *Swine* they used the Word *an unclean Thing*. 3. Observe, That the Word in the Original (b), which we translate *Jesting*, signifies the Buffoonries of the Theatre. Observe 4. That all those Things here mentioned by the Apostle were common and ordinary among the Gentiles, I mean the *Greeks* and *Romans*, and by the Gross and Body of the People were not reckon’d Criminal. These Re-

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(a) *Exod.* xxiii. 13. (b) *εὐτραπελία*.

marks being premised, I presume to make the following Paraphrase of the Passage before us.

‘ BRETHREN, be ye Followers of God as  
 ‘ dear Children, and as for Fornication, Un-  
 ‘ cleanness, Covetousness, I do forbid them  
 ‘ in the strongest manner, and as Things to  
 ‘ which ye ought to bear the greatest Averse-  
 ‘ on: And let them not once be named a-  
 ‘ mong you, not named with Approbation  
 ‘ not named with Pleasure, not named with  
 ‘ Extenuation, and never named without Ne-  
 ‘ cessity; for they are unworthy of and unbe-  
 ‘ coming Saints and Christians. I likewise  
 ‘ forbid filthy and foolish Talking, and the Bu-  
 ‘ foonries of the Theatre, which are noway  
 ‘ convenient for you, but on the contrary  
 ‘ highly inconvenient for People of your grave  
 ‘ Calling and holy Profession; Thanksgiving  
 ‘ and spiritual Songs of Praise and Blessing to  
 ‘ your GOD, being much more suitable to  
 ‘ your Case as Christians. For, now, ye that  
 ‘ have been converted from *Judaism*, verily  
 ‘ well know, and ye knew it before your Con-  
 ‘ version, from the Decalogue, that no Whore-  
 ‘ monger, nor unclean Person, nor covetous  
 ‘ Man, who is an Idolater, can have any In-  
 ‘ heritance in the Kingdom of GOD, which is  
 ‘ the Kingdom of CHRIST. And ye that have  
 ‘ forsaken the Idolatry of the Heathens, in or-  
 ‘ der to become Christians, don’t imagine  
 ‘ that those Things which I as an Apostle for-  
 ‘ bid

bid you all, whether *Jewish* or *Gentile* Converts, are the less dangerous and sinful, because they are ordinary and common among the *Gentiles* from whom ye have separated yourselves. And tho' there will not be wanting among them, and perhaps among yourselves, witty Men that shall endeavour to perswade you, that there is no manner of Harm or Crime in these Things, let them not deceive you with their specious, but vain Reasonings. For I do assure you, that because of those very Things, which they make light of, the Wrath of God (the highest of all Penalties) cometh upon the Children of Disobedience. And tho' *they think it strange that ye run not with them, as formerly, into the same Excess of Riot and Reveling (a)*, and speak Evil of you for not doing it, be not ye Partakers with them in these their Crimes, that ye partake not also of the dreadful Punishment, the Wrath of God, and Exclusion from his Kingdom.

By this Paraphrase, which I take to be the Apostle's Meaning, the Theatre falls to the Ground, and the wide Gates of the Play-house are all shut. The Defenders of the Stage allow, That it would have been a commendable and necessary Zeal in the Apostles to have declared against the Theatres of their Time, that met them every where in the Face. And for that

(a) 1 Pet. iv. 4.



that Reason, it is my sincere Opinion, that the Apostle *Paul* hath declared against them, in the Passage before us, and against all Stages whatever, where, *Filthiness, foolish Talking or Jestings* is practised. For if the Stage is hereby condemned, it is not because of the Idolatry of it, but for the Gestures, and Language used in Plays.

I HOPE it will not be pretended that this is but a Consequence drawn from Scripture, which cannot have the same Weight with an express Prohibition, which the flagrant Case and crying Danger of the wicked and immoral Theatres of the Heathen did require. For publick Stews are not prohibited *nominatim*, and yet every Body believes they are forbidden by the same Law which forbids Fornication and Uncleaness. And for the same Reason, I do conceive, that the Stage is prohibited by the same Law which forbids the Buffoonries of it.

By searching the Scriptures we find *Revelling* twice mentioned in our Translation of the *New Testament*. The Word is purely *English*, and not very usual in our ordinary Conversation: And no Wonder, for until of late, the Thing itself hath been very uncommon among us. In a legal, or municipal Law Sense, it takes in all publick Shews, and the Stage among the rest (a). It is therefore certain that in the Opinion

(a) Our City-hinter, Page 19. says, *We pay the Master of the Revels Dues*. It seems our Comedians hold their Freedom under him.

pinion of our Translators, the Stage is condemn-  
ed as Heathen and Unchristian.

THE Apostle Paul, Gal. v. reckons *Revellings* among the Works of the Flesh, ver. 19. Now the Works of the Flesh are manifest, which are these, Adultery, Fornication, Uncleaness, Lasciviousness, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness, Revellings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in Time past, that they who do such Things, shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. If *Revellings* signifies Stage-plays, it is evident the Apostle had often forbidden them, and that under the highest Penalty, Exclusion from the Kingdom of GOD. The Sanction is exceedingly awful, and should keep us at a Distance from any Thing that but even resembles the Theatre of the Heathen.

THE other Passage where *Revellings* is mentioned, is 1 Pet. iv. 3 The Time past of our Life may suffice us to have wrought the Will of the Gentiles, when we walked in Lasciviousness, Lusts, Excess of Wine, Revellings, Banquetings, and abominable Idolatries. And the Word *Rioting*, mentioned Rom. xiii. 12. is originally the same with what is here rendered *Revelling*. The Night is far spent, the Day is at Hand, let us therefore cast off the Works of Darknesh, and let us put on the Armour of Light, and walk honestly as in the Day, not in Rioting. (or in Revelling) and Drunkenness, Chambering and Wantonness,  
not

*not in Strife and Envy.* Now, whatever is here forbidden by the Word *Revelling*, is forbidden as a Heathnish Crime, and such as is unworthy of our Christian Profession.

FOR my Part, I do not think that our Translators have mistaken the Meaning of the Apostle for the Word *Komos*, in the Original (a), includes all vain, lascivious, ludicrous and jocular Representations, not only Dancing and luxurious Feasting, but wanton, light and amorous Interludes; and I do believe, is the very same from which the Word *Comedy* is derived.

Now, since *Revellings* comprehends all ludicrous and jocular Representations, and all wanton, light and amorous Interludes, we have no Right to contract, and shorten away the Sense of the Word to Gluttony, or Excess in Eating and Feasting. And if we should once begin to mutilate the Word, there would be no End, until the whole Meaning was destroyed. One takes away *Interludes*, another takes away *Dancing*, and a Third takes away *Feasting*, and all the Excess that usually attended it. And the Apostolical Prohibition could never take Place, but when all of them were joined together in full Form. Besides, *Gal. v.* and *Rom. xiii.* *Drunkenness* is likewise mentioned. And *1 Pet. iv.* *Drunkenness* and *Banqueting* are both mentioned: And *Revelling* must signify something which is not *precisely* the same with either. And

(a) *Κομος*.



And another Reason why I believe that *Interludes* are intended, is (a), that it was usual with the *Heathen, Greeks and Romans*, to have Stage-plays and *Interludes* at all their great and costly *Entertainments* and riotous Feasts, as is the Practice of the more opulent *Cbinese* at this Day. Since *Interludes* were the Top of Banqueting and Feasting, I am sure they are in a special Manner Part of the Apostolical Prohibition, as being the highest Pitch of Heathen Extravagance. But my greatest Reason of all, for believing that the Stage is prohibited under the Word *Revelling* is, That a Zeal for the Glory of GOD, and the Good of Souls, laid the Apostles under a Necessity of declaring against the *Heathen Theatre*. And I had rather believe that the heathen Comedy stands in the Prohibition, than impeach them for Omission of their Duty.

IF *Filthinefs, foolish Talking, and Jesting*, are still the Practice of the Stage, and if all *Interludes, Comedies, Tragedies, Farces*, are comprehended in the Word *Revelling*, then are they forbidden as unchristian. And it is altogether out of Purpose to argue, that there are a great many good Things in Plays, with which the

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(a) *Plutarch. de gloria Atheniensium, & Sympof. Lib. vii. Quest. 8.* As for new Comedy, it is such a necessary Ingredient of all great Entertainments, that, so to speak, one may as well make a Feast without Wine as without *Menander*.

Audience is as much edified as with Sermons.  
 For supposing this is true, as it is false in Fact,  
 the Thing is prohibited, and we ought to forbear.  
 And if there are any as much edified with Plays as with Preaching, I am afraid they are not edified at all, though they may be more diverted in the Play-house than in the Church. And though Virtue is praised and commended, and Vice is ridiculed by the Stage, yet that can never protect it against an Apostolical Condemnation. GOD hath provided another Way for the Reformation and Salvation of a lost World, and they are out of their Duty who have Recourse to any prohibited Means for attaining that great and glorious End. And what did all the Wit and Wisdom, all the Poetry and Prose, all the Eloquence and Oratory of the World avail towards the Reformation of Mankind, before the Coming of our LORD JESUS? Nothing at all. The World grew worse rather than better, under all these political Helps to Piety and Virtue. And after that in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe (a). For the Recommendation of Virtue the GOSPEL doth not want the Assistance of the Stage, and all those that know, that true and godly Reformation begins at the Heart touched with the Grace of GOD, will never seek Help from such Strollers

(a) 1 Cor. i. 21.

as this World generally affords. And as for their ridiculing of Vice, it is in itself sinful. The Sins of the World call for Rivers of Tears, and not for Laughter. It is a poor Sport to make merry with your own, or with the Sins and Miseries of others. The blessed Man *doth not stand in the Way of Sinners, nor doth he sit on the Seat of the Scornful (a)*: But Fools make a Mock at Sin (b). A certain Defender of the Stage acknowledges, 'That no Vice but such as the Audience may safely laugh at ought to be brought into a Comedy (c).' And if all Vices are Sins, (and I believe they are) none at all ought to be brought upon the Stage. And as for the little un sinful Follies that are below the Dignity of the Pulpit to take Notice of, to have them corrected and amended, is of so little Importance to Society, that it can never justify the unnecessary Loss of Time and Money thrown away upon the Play-house, and far less can it justify the Breach of an Apostolical Prohibition.

THESE are the Reasons for which I think the Stage sinful and unchristian.

(a) Psal. i. 1. (b) Prov. xiv. 9. (c) Filmer, p. 63.

**F I N I S.**





